

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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## NATIONAL GALLERY CELEBRATES FIRST 200 YEARS OF AMERICAN FURNITURE AND DECORATIVE ARTS

WASHINGTON, D. C. January 4, 1980. In Praise of America: 1650-1830, an exhibition of seventy-seven exceptionally fine examples of American furniture and decorative arts from the mid-17th to the early-19th centuries will span the Washington Birthday and July 4th weekends at the National Gallery of Art, on view from February 17 through July 6.

The objects have been selected to present the best of American design and craftsmanship during this country's first 200 years and to bring new information in the field to the public.

Lent by public and private collections in the United States, the objects include highboys, chairs, sofas, chests, sideboards, desks, mirrors, clocks and works in glass, silver, brass, copper and iron representing craftsmen working both in the cities (Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Charleston and New Orleans) and in various rural regions.

This is the first time the National Gallery has ever devoted an exhibition to this subject. The exhibition will be installed chronologically in the East Building upper level galleries, with sub-groupings of aesthetic and academic interest. The installation will present each object as a work of art in its own right, rather than part of a period room ensemble.

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Guest curator for the exhibition at the Gallery is Wendy A. Cooper, assistant curator of American decorative arts at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The installation has been designed by Gaillard F. Ravenel and Mark A. Leithauser of the Gallery's Installation Design Department in collaboration with Ms. Cooper.

Simultaneously, the exhibition will mark the publication of a book by Ms. Cooper surveying fifty years of scholarship and discovery since an exhibition in 1929 at the American Art Association's galleries in New York, organized as a benefit for the Girl Scouts of America, that inspired a generation of collectors, scholars and connoisseurs. An introductory room of the exhibition visually reconstructs the essence of the 1929 show and its heritage that later became a vital influence in the interpretation of the decorative arts for major museums throughout the United States.

In addition to Ms. Cooper's book, being published by Alfred A. Knopf, a pocket-sized guide to the show will be available.

The exhibition has been supported in part by a grant from Dayton Hudson Corporation and J. E. Caldwell Jewelers, as well as by a group of individual contributors.

Concurrent with the Gallery's major survey of mid-19th century American landscape painting, American Light, the two shows together, in addition to the permanent collection of American art, make a kind of festival of American art. In addition, the National Collection of Fine Arts will pick the story up where the Gallery leaves it in its exhibition The American Renaissance - 1876-1917.

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### The Seventeenth Century

Among the seventeenth-century objects will be the monumental wainscot armchair carved by either Thomas Dennis or William Searle of Ipswich, Massachusetts, and an extraordinary, similarly attributed tape loom. A "great chair" retaining its original leather upholstery, never before exhibited, is a new discovery of a previously unknown American form. A rare Virginia court cupboard will be seen in contrast to a sophisticated Boston chest of drawers with doors.

### Eighteenth-Century Furniture

A New York trompe l'oeil kas (storage cupboard) and a Boston William and Mary japanned dressing table exhibit decorative techniques of different regions and specialized craftsmen. A lavishly inlaid slant-front desk from Pennsylvania and a block-front tall-case clock made in Norwich, Connecticut, display the sophistication and talent of non-urban craftsmen. A signed and dated Newport easy chair with magnificent canvas work flamestitch on the front and sides and an embroidered landscape on the back is a rare survival of original upholstery. Other important documented pieces of furniture include a card table made and signed by John Townsend in 1762, a marble-top table sold by John Goddard in 1755, a sideboard by William Whitehead of New York (w.1792-99), and a delicate half-round Boston card table created by John Seymour and Son.

### Eighteenth-Century Decorative Arts

American goldsmiths made some outstanding objects such as the rare, specially commissioned monteith made by Daniel Henchman and engraved by Nathaniel Hurd in 1771 for the president of Dartmouth College,

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and the large tea service made in 1792 by Paul Revere for John and Mehitable Templeman of Boston. While most goldsmiths of the period are well-known and their work usually marked, scholars are now trying to identify the work of other American metalsmiths based on a few marked objects. Among these singular examples are objects like the iron and brass candlestand by Benjamin Gerrish, the copper coffee pot by Benjamin Harbeson, the iron pipe tongs by Joseph Chapin, and the magnificent iron fireback from Isaac Zane's Marlboro Furnace in Virginia. Few documented examples of eighteenth-century American glass and ceramics survive, but examples from the factories of Caspar Wistar, John Frederick Amelung, and Bonnin and Morris will be represented in the show.

#### Early Nineteenth-Century Furniture

Richly veneered, polished and gilt pieces of early nineteenth-century American furniture frequently had their sources of inspiration in French designs such as a marble-top center table with gilt figural supports and a severely classical pier table, both by the French emigré cabinetmaker Charles-Honoré Lannuier. The extravagance and exuberance of this period can be seen in the carved dolphins on both sofas and armchairs, the magnificent gilt girandole looking glasses, large and ornately decorated silver coffee urns, and a superb Philadelphia tea service made by Chaudron and Rasch between 1809 and 1812.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director (Information Officer) or Pamela J. Driscoll, Information Office, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C. 20565 area code 202, 737-4215, ext. 511.